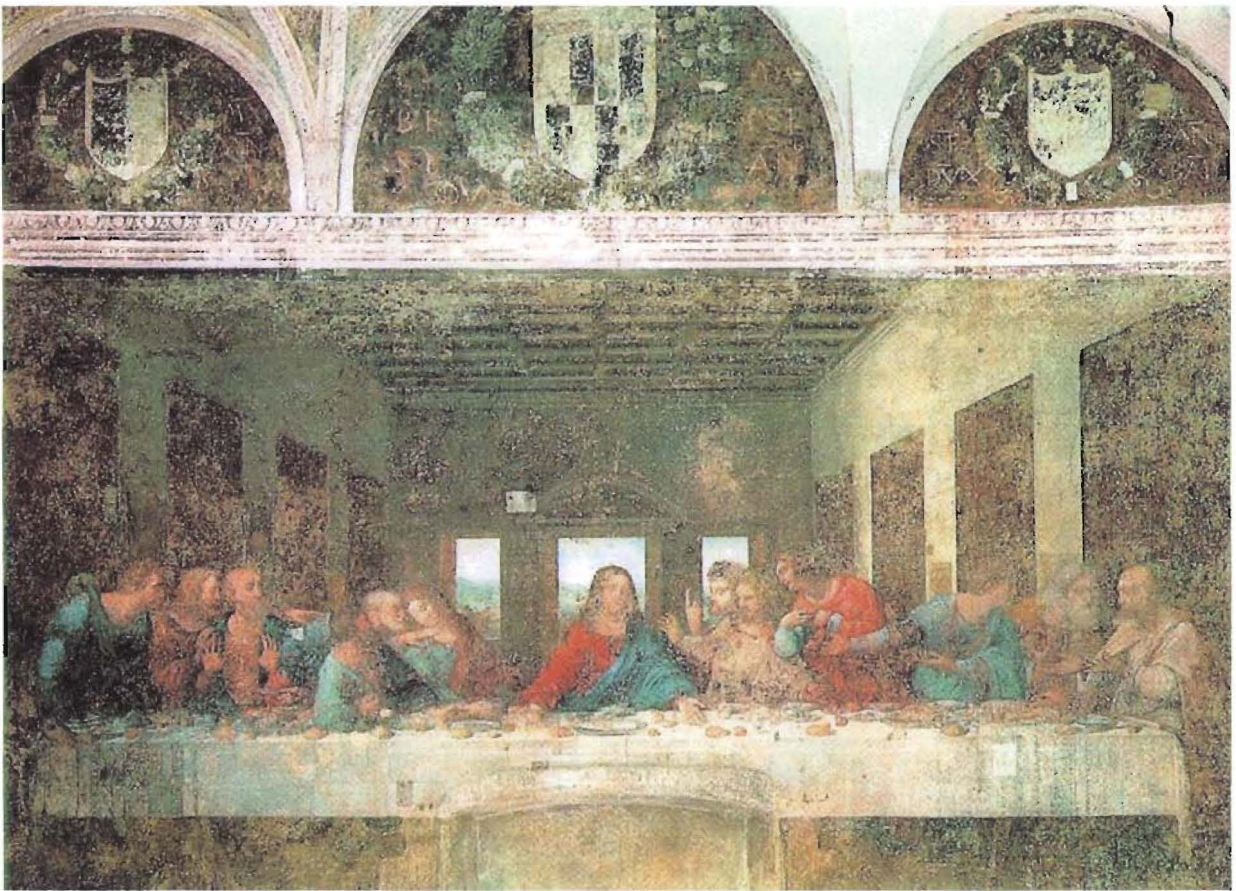


The Da Vinci Code:

Canonical, Captivating, and Controversial



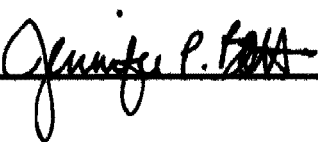
A Thesis by: Michael Whitan

***The Da Vinci Code:
Canonical, Captivating, and
Controversial***

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract

Dan Brown's novel, The Da Vinci Code, is a book that has captivated modern readers across America and has carved a cozy niche on the Bestseller's List for years now. The suspenseful murder mystery wraps religious symbology and iconography with popular Christian doctrine to develop a story that not only pulls the reader along page after page, but also causes many readers to question and investigate the very foundations of their faith.

What is it about this book that makes it so extremely popular, and how valid are the various claims that Brown makes regarding Jesus, Mary Magdalene, the Catholic Church, and the infamous Holy Grail?

This thesis will explore a number of possible reasons that explain the Code's success and notoriety in modern American culture. Further, the various theories presented in the novel will be investigated and researched in order to shed more light on religious supposals and their connection to the basis of the Christian religion. At the conclusion, a final theory can be formed as to why the novel has become one of the most popular books of all time, and whether one can believe what Brown writes, or whether the plausibility of its foundation requires, quite literally, a monumental leap of faith.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Bott for her wonderful guidance and support both with this thesis and in many other aspects of my academic career.

Disclaimer

If you have not read the *Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown, and plan on reading it in the future, then the author *strongly* recommends that you not read this thesis. The subject matter reveals much about the plot, characters, and theories presented in the book, and spoils much of the intensity and intrigue that the *Da Vinci Code* so rightly deserves. It is therefore with fair warning that any reader continues...

Part I: Popularity of the Da Vinci Code

The groundbreaking and ever-so-popular novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, by author Dan Brown, is a mind-racing search for religious truth, delicately woven into a modern murder mystery, complete with all the plot elements necessary for an excellent story of suspense. Since its worldwide release in 2003, the book has become a booming best seller, reaching sales of over 25 million copies in 44 languages as of April 2005. As a result, *Time* journalist Michele Orecklin states, "Brown has been responsible for renewed interest in Leonardo Da Vinci, Gnostic texts, and early Christian history." Once more, Brown's explosive novel has spurred a recent religious revolution influencing the creation of "a flood of historical thrillers; eight books denying the claims of the novel and seven guides to read along with it; a movie starring Tom Hanks; and an NBC reality show" (Orecklin 1). Some readers love the novel because of its well-written style and approach to a classic who-dun-it tale. However, the book has achieved fame because many Americans have either heard, read, or seen that *The Da Vinci Code* (hereafter referred to as the *Code*) is a book that deals with important religious themes and issues, and raises questions that rock the very foundations of the Catholic Church, and subsequently, the Christian religion.

Nevertheless, countless numbers of books have questioned ideological religious sentiments across the ages, but none have enjoyed the popularity and epidemically strengthened growth that the *Code* has received. So, one is logically led to the question, “What is it about this book that makes it so popular among American readers?” Could it be that the book is the best murder mystery ever written, or that the sheer publicity behind the book has led to its soaring success? This author thinks differently, and posits that to find the answer to this question, one has to search deeper into the American culture that surrounds us. People read books because they enjoy them, and if a good book emerges, it might sell well for a while, but would certainly not endure the extravagant success that the *Code* has experienced. Surely there are forces in society today that are enabling Brown’s novel to experience such sweeping and long-lasting success. It is this author’s opinion that both the rises of feminism and the staunch criticism of the Roman Catholic Church in present times have coupled to influence greater interest in Brown’s novel. When these trends are combined with the Church’s involvement in a number of scandals, and Americans’ zealous yearning for conspiracies, it becomes clear what forces have skyrocketed *The Da Vinci Code* to the top of the New York Times Bestseller’s List.

Perhaps before one begins to delve into the theories upheld by the book, it would be beneficial to include a brief synopsis of the *Code*, so as to refresh the memory of any reader who has been separated from the book for some time. The novel begins with the murder of Claude Sauniere, the curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Strangely enough, a Harvard symbologist, Robert Langdon, is called to the museum to lend his expertise on the bizarre crime scene. Soon after arriving, he meets Sophie Neveu, a French police agent, and also a grand-daughter to the deceased. What ensues is a trek through France and England that reveals tremendous revelations about the Christian faith and the reality of the Holy Grail. Meanwhile, an obsessive monk named

Silas Marner is also after the Holy Grail in order to protect it from what he believes is evil hands. The rest of the novel deals with a whirlwind of history, theology, mystery, and folklore, culminating in the belief that the Holy Grail is actually Mary Magdalene and a royal bloodline begun by the conception of a child between her and Jesus Christ. The novel is a spellbinding collection of intense chapters, held together by the climatic speculation of who will retrieve the Grail and discover its true identity. Knowing these basics about the story line and plot elements certainly becomes beneficial when analyzing the various forces that helped launch the *Code* to such a successful status.

Feminism

America has experienced an upturn in the rise of feminism in the last half-century, which has made it possible for women to find new roles and stations in society. Women are now actively involved in science, politics, academia, and the arts in great numbers, and it was only a matter of time before religion would need to allow a more important role for them in application and administration. The problem, however, lies in the very nature of the Christian faith and its subjugation of women both in practice and in preaching. The Christian religion, with Catholicism as the most noteworthy example, has worked for hundreds of years to place women in inferior positions in relation to men. The very source of this inequity dates back to biblical times, and even before, as Dan Brown touches on in his novel. This is where the *Code* makes an entrance.

The Da Vinci Code provides an explanation (or several) as to where the origin of this gender double standard instituted itself. Christian Journalist Patrick McCormick asserts, “in [the *Code*’s] own popularizing way, it also gives voice to a growing feminist critique of a patriarchal church and secrets it keeps about the goodness and godliness of women” (US Catholic). It is

Brown's point that the "harlotization" of Mary Magdalene led to the subjugation of women and the outcast of their influence in religion and other social matters (Burstein 15). The novel then provides a solution for modern women who feel that they have been mistreated and misrepresented in their faith by making the startling proposition that Jesus was not only romantically involved with Mary Magdalene, but that there was a royal marriage between them, resulting in a pregnancy and the beginning of an ultra-royal bloodline. It is a stretch of the imagination, at least, especially for indoctrinated Christians who "have been told for 1,500 years that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute," and certainly not the wife of anyone, most particularly not the wife of Jesus (Kulman 2). To believe this would be to raise the level of Mary Magdalene, and women in general, to that of unimaginable status. But this is exactly the point of the novel, and exactly the belief that so many people are searching for after reading the book and realizing that "The *Da Vinci Code* comes out and says... 'Gee, is this something else that's being kept from us?'" (Kulman 2).

Even in the modern religious environment, Catholicism teaches that women are the source of original sin and women are not permitted to become priests and spread the good word, but rather to be submissive to men. For women, Catholics in particular, the notion that a woman was married to Jesus and responsible for carrying on not only his message, but also his legacy, are incredibly liberating conceptions. Reading the *Code* not only reveals this belief that Mary Magdalene held one of the most important titles and positions in the New Testament, but also the view that this information was subverted by the early church in order to downgrade the status of women; thereby limiting their power and influence. Modern women can certainly identify with this idea, and therefore the *Code* seems to provide an explanation as to why they are still viewed unequally under many religious issues. Brown's story provides the evidence that many people

were searching for to explain women's roles in the church, as well as what their role in society should be and stands as "a kind of ideological battle cry for the feminist movement (Burstein 307). The *Code* allows many Christians, women especially, to explore a new avenue of the faith, and question whether the Church was scheming to create an inequitable relationship between the sexes. The book may be well written and its suspenseful nature may very well be responsible for its fame, but "still, a great deal of the novel's appeal is its feminist sensibility" (McCormick 2).

Criticism of the Catholic Faith

The Catholic Church has certainly not been free from criticism as of late, and has found itself in a number of earth-shattering scandals ranging from sexual deviance to embezzlement. Author Richard Wrightman Fox points out his belief that "Brown is riding the wave of revulsion against the corruption in the Catholic Church" (Kulman 1). The scandal involving a number of pedophilic priests across the world has probably been the most damning to the organization, and has worked to cast a negative light on the entire church while driving away numbers of once-devoted Christians. This anti-Catholic sentiment has strengthened the message imbedded in the *Code* that the Church worked covertly and evilly to hide many aspects of the Christian story, including the true role of Mary Magdalene. People around the world, but Americans in particular, have become fed up with the dealings of the Catholic Church, and for them, the *Code* provides just another example of the corruptness of the Holy See (Kulman 2). Tacitly, a *US News and World Report* article states that "The *Code*... was published at a moment when doubts about the institutional integrity were running high... Really, the book is in many ways about how bad the church is" (Kulman 1).

In fact, the book takes the judgment to the next level by indicating that the Church was corrupt from its very inception. Had *The Da Vinci Code* been released fifteen years prior, it is

absolutely plausible to hypothesize that it would not have experienced such great success then, simply because the anti-Catholic organizational sentiment was not an important social trend at the time. In fact, a previous book known as *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, written by Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent, was released in 1982 with practically the same basis and theory of the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. That book never reached the Bestseller's List, however, indicating that the preconceptions regarding the Catholic institution were not as heated in the past, and Americans' opinions of the faith exploded after scandals and defamation of the church became more widespread in the 1990s and beyond.

It is not to say that the Catholic Church doesn't work to help millions of people around the world, or provide charity and grace to people in need. Nor is it the point of this thesis to slander the Catholic Church or attempt to blame it for a huge misconception about the basis of Christianity. Frankly, the evidence is shaky, at best, to support such a claim. The point to be made here is that even though the church is an admirable force in many people's lives, it has also been involved in a number of activities that have led many people to question its mission and purpose. This questioning of the Church and its leaders has increased in America in the past decade or so, and therefore, given the impetus for Americans to delve into a book that questions another aspect of the Catholic Church and its motives. The *Code* had the unbelievable luck to be written and released at a time when many Americans were confused about Catholicism, and the book provided an explanation, whether believable or not, that added fuel to the religious fire.

Love of Conspiracies

As if the rise of feminism and the scandals centered on the Catholic Church weren't enough to instill a passion for the *Code* in American hearts, another force has been prevalent in American society for countless years—the love of conspiracies. Americans have always loved

conspiracies; that is, the need to explain something, usually on a seemingly unbelievable basis, which one did not originally know needed explanation. For instance, after President John F. Kennedy was shot, conspiracies abounded as to the motive behind and the persons responsible for the assassination. And everyone is familiar with the conspiracies that surfaced after the Watergate scandal and the Iran-Contra dealings, although unlike many conspiracies, these were proven to be true (Burstein 201). Conspiracies have presented themselves throughout history, and Americans especially have become engrossed in their believability. Dan Burstein addresses the phenomenon by noting “conspiracy theories in general...have permeated the zeitgeist of modern society, American society especially” (201). The ideas presented in the *Code* are no exception.

Simply put, “people are reacting to the subject matter...that’s what is capturing people’s imagination” (USA Today). Had the book explained well-known Christian beliefs and history, it certainly would not have skyrocketed to international fame. The very fact that the book questions not only the Church, but also the foundations of the Christian belief are what make the book so appealing to so many people—Americans especially. Directly put, the book is an provocative collection of various conspiracy theories; some with credible evidence and fact to support them, and yet others with only conjectural thoughts and leaps of faith as supposed proof. Perhaps Anthony Wilson-Smith puts it best by writing, “The real story behind Brown’s success lies in our wish to believe—if not in God, then in something, if nothing more than a super-size conspiracy theory” (Maclean’s 1).

Dan Brown’s *Code* deals with a conspiracy as the very backbone of an intensely complex and intellectual plot. However, Brown did not simply dream up this supposed collusion one lonely night—the origins and pieces of this particular belief have been swimming around

religious and academic sources for decades, if not centuries. That being so, one might ask, “why have no other pieces dedicated to this theme become so well-known among readers?” The answer lies in how Brown approached the conspiracy and masterfully knitted it into one of the most popular and well-read genres in history—the classic murder mystery. Brown’s novel-centered conspiracy “is a juicy one and he’s made the most of it, creating a story with a very effective cliffhanger at the end of almost every one of his 105 chapters” (Klinghoffer 1). Surely, American fiction is teeming with conspiracy theorists alike, but there are a few traits present in the *Code* that make it one of the most popular fiction books of all time.

First, the book deals with a conspiracy that “is just an awfully neat one” (Klinghoffer 1). While the conspiracies behind the JFK assassination or the crash of TWA Flight 800 are intriguing, they do not tend to affect many people’s lives, whether directly or indirectly. The conspiracy in the *Code* that questions the very understanding and conception of Jesus and the Christian religion affects nearly two billion people in the most direct way. As David Klinghoffer of *The National Review* writes, ‘If true, this theory would overturn some of the central beliefs of Christians” and “What’s at stake in *The Da Vinci Code* is nothing less than traditional Christianity itself” (2). The fact that Brown’s book deals with such a monumental issue with potentially earth-shattering consequences makes the *Code* one of the most popular conspiracy theories ever written.

Secondly, conspiracies usually need to include supposed facts, either concealed from the public, or hidden in plain view among the material world, unbeknownst to the ignorant masses. This is exactly what the *Code* theorizes; that the conspiracy of Jesus being married to Mary Magdalene was not only shrouded by the early Catholic church, but that elements of this belief are present in numerous paintings, sculptures, buildings, and documents. The conspiracy gains

most of its momentum from this point—that the clues are hidden across Europe, evident to the public, but closed to ignorant eyes because of intense indoctrination and centuries of lore.

Brown includes many of these supposedly true discoveries in his novel, “with an emphasis on the cryptic meanings of the paintings and drawings of Leonardo da Vinci” (Klinghoffer 1).

Finally, a successful conspiracy theory must present a claim that an issue needs explanation, when most of the believers think that it has already been explained. For instance, the US government has issued reports and statements that the supposed UFO crash at Roswell, New Mexico was nothing more than a botched weather balloon experiment. The information and summarization is there for anyone who would like to investigate it, and yet, there are countless conspiracies centering on what actually happened in the desert, instead of taking the approved explanation at face value. The same situation presents itself in the *Code*, where Brown and others try to explain Jesus’ relationship with Mary Magdalene as a marriage, when millions of Christians have already been told (and would have continued happily believing) that he was never married and she was a reformed sinner. Klinghoffer theorizes that these conspiracies must attempt to make light of “the revelation of concealed complexity all around” (2). After finishing Brown’s book, it is nearly impossible to not ponder the complexity of the Christian religion and use those thoughts to question whether any of his hypotheses might actually be true. Regardless, the inclusion of what may be the world’s most important conspiracy theory in the *Code* creates a new character in the novel—and this character ends up being the most intriguing one in the entire book. This is one of the reasons of why the book has enjoyed so much fanfare, for as Laura Miller of *The New York Times* reveals, “The only thing more powerful than a worldwide conspiracy, it seems, is our desire to believe in one” (Burstein 300). Brown’s literary element of the Jesus-Mary conspiracy allows readers to question an incredibly important aspect of their

lives and the world, when before, we did not even question the story's validity. It is much the same as "what keeps people's eyes glued to the ocean even when there is ostensibly nothing going on out there" (Klinghoffer 2).

Shuffle feminism, Catholic calumny, and conspiracy theories aside, and *The Da Vinci Code* is just another suspenseful murder mystery thriller complete with numerous twists and turns. However, the prevalence of these forces in modern society aided in shaping what may be the second greatest literary phenomenon in history. The term "second" is necessary, because ironically, "one of the very few books to sell more copies than the *Da Vinci Code* in the past two years is the Bible" (Orecklin). Releasing the novel at a time when one, females are questioning their position in religion and the church, two, the Catholic Church is riddled with controversy, and three, the American lust for conspiracies is still fervent, has led to a book that has taken the nation by storm. Its seemingly everlasting position on the Bestseller list is just one indication of its amazing popularity. The discussion, backlash, and attention centered on the book's various themes attest to the fact that, whether one agrees with the postulates presented in the novel or not, the debate over Christian foundations is real and important. And, after reading the novel and thinking about its suggestions and possible ramifications, it becomes evident that regardless of veracity, "A Da Vinci painting is no longer a landscape or a portrait, but a portal to a strange and secret world" (McCormick 2).

Part II: Truthfulness of the Da Vinci Code

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is a novel that raises numerous questions about the Christian faith and theology in general. The heart of the book deals with the subject of the Holy Grail and raises a different theory explaining its importance and relevance to the story of Christ's life. The book also addresses a number of other significant theories ranging from the conceptualization of Mary Magdalene to the importance of the lost Gnostic Gospels and even includes mysterious groups such as the Knights Templar and the ever-secret Priory of Sion. Most notably, however, is Brown's claim that all inclusions of artwork in his novel are completely true and accurate, including a new interpretation of Da Vinci's masterpiece, *The Last Supper*, which he claims gives more credence to the alternative supposition of what actually constitutes the Holy Grail. While readers worldwide have attested to the brilliance and captivation of this novel, one cannot put the book away without questioning, at least somewhat, the validity of his far-reaching statements. As Patrick McCormick rightly states about the *Code*, "Unfortunately...it's tough to know where fact ends and fiction begins, and few serious scholars would make or support the sweeping sort of claims found here" (2). This section will attempt to shed more light on the subjects of Brown's theories, examining aspects of Mary Magdalene, the Holy Grail, the Knights Templar, Da Vinci's renowned artwork, and of, course, Jesus Christ himself.

Mary Magdalene

The *Code* seems to revolve around a single character that does not even have one line in the entire book, but yet her inclusion is vital to the entire structure of the story. Her name is Mary Magdalene, and her position in the novel is paramount, while her position in the Bible is minor, as she "was not famous for the great things she did or said" (Van Biema 1). To boil it

down, Brown makes a speculation through his characters, Robert Langdon and Leigh Teabing, that seems to outrageously claim that Mary was not only close to Jesus, but was actually married to him and became pregnant with his child before the crucifixion. The book explains that most Jewish men at this time would have found it socially unacceptable to not have been married, and that the Gnostic Gospels help explain the close connection that Mary and Jesus shared.

However, surrounding this new theory of Jesus' nuptials is a storm of controversy and inquiries targeted at the true nature of Mary Magdalene. For contemporary Christians today, very little is actually known about Jesus Christ, but even less is known about the mysterious woman named Mary Magdalene, which creates a large problem when attempting to determine the soundness of Brown's claims. Alternatively, the mystique surrounding Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus also grants Brown a wide range of latitude for involving her in his story, since "Who she is is a mystery, and that's what makes her so great to write about" (Burstein 246).

The first question that many readers may encounter when reading the novel is "Who was Mary Magdalene?" If this were well-known and understood, then the issues that surround the *Code* would certainly not be nearly as controversial as they have become. The Bible and other religious sources make mention of three different women named Mary. One author describes "the first named as Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils" (Luke 381).

Another Mary is Mary of Bethany, and a third is an unnamed woman who anointed and washed Jesus' feet with her long dark hair. Surprisingly enough, today's Christians have been brought up under the notion that the Mary with seven devils and the Mary who washed Jesus' feet are one in the same. In addition, most laypeople could not even tell you who Mary of Bethany was or her relationship to Jesus or any disciple for that matter. Even though the Catholic Church issued a correction in 1969 negating Pope Gregory the Great's interpretation that Mary was a

prostitute, which he delivered in an official opinion in 591, the message has been slow in filtering down into the pews (Winkett 21). The common belief of Mary Magdalene as a sinful whore “only exemplifies the tenacity with which opinion holds its place in the human mind after it has been fairly rooted” (Luke 380-1).

Most of what we do know about Mary Magdalene comes from the four gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As any theologian would tell you, however, the gospels are not exactly congruent in the stories that they tell, and information is scattered across the four in what seems to be random happenstance (Burstein 53). Luke, however, gives us an interesting interpretation of Mary, “describing her moral status...as *harmartolos*, meaning one who has committed a crime against the Jewish law, although this does not necessarily imply prostitution” (Burstein 15). This seems to be the origin of casting Mary Magdalene as a whore, but one who has repented and represents the dredges of society saved by the power of religion and faith. Lucy Winkett reveals that “the penitent sinner, the reformed prostitute, has been the prevailing characterization of Mary” (20). Historically, this is the version of Mary Magdalene that has transferred from generation to generation, and there are many instances in the Christian belief that lend credence to this “harlotization” of Mary.

First of all, the notion of Mary’s unbound hair gives much weight to the theory of her as a prostitute, for hardly any self-respecting Jewish woman at this time would go around with her hair showing (Burstein 15). As if unbound hair were not enough, the gospels also recount a story where Mary washes Jesus’ feet with her unbound hair—an act that certainly would have been deemed outrageous by the disciples. Yet, Jesus allows her to perform this action, which can be interpreted to mean the act of *hieros gamos*, or an ancient marital rite. Certainly, with this interpretation in mind, one can see where Brown was coming from when making the statement

that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were close, and according to him and other scholars (e.g., Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent), were actually married.

Second, these instances point to a sub-theory, if you will, that Mary Magdalene was not from Judea, but was actually a foreigner, and might not have actually been born Jewish, but was reformed later in life. Of course, many Christians have heard the dramatic story where Mary is about to be stoned for prostitution when Jesus intervenes and proclaims that one from the crowd who has never sinned shall cast the first stone. As Dan Burstein recounts, “human nature has always been suspicious of foreigners” and stoning a foreigner for not following the Jewish customs of Judea would have been a somewhat routine act (17). The question of Mary’s origins is just as foggy as her identity, and many claim that she hailed from Magdala, in Judea, and yet there was no city by that name during Jesus’ lifetime. However, there was a Magdolum, which was just across the border in Egypt, indicating again that Mary may have been an outsider, and this was the reason she was not only persecuted in Israel, but was misunderstood and sometimes resented by the disciples. Coming to a firm conclusion to the true identity of Mary Magdalene is not an easy task, and the only logical conclusion is that “there is, in fact, no *clear* Biblical evidence for this character” (Winkett 20).

After agonizing over the possibilities of Mary Magdalene’s true identity, readers of the *Code* must then analyze whether Jesus, the Son of God, could have actually been married to her as Brown so eloquently surmises. Christians learn from the very first days of Sunday school that Jesus lived and preached for years, traveling the countryside, performing miracles, and inspiring thousands of Jews into believing a new faith. Not once is there a mention of Jesus’ wife, and most of the stories told about Mary are the tales that lead Christians to believe that she was a repented sinner. And while “there is never any phrase that might remotely be interpreted as

alluding to his legal spouse” contained within the Bible, one still has to wrestle with the consequences of believing in this idea (Burstein 18). One must remember that the Bible did not begin rolling off the printing presses that day after the crucifixion, but that it took centuries to develop the canonical scripture as we know it. Developing the most important book in human history involved a number of negotiations, debates, and controversies, and is it really that far-fetched to believe that church elders decided to omit any positive mention of Mary Magdalene or a holy marriage in order to preserve the notion of a sinless and utterly amazing Son of God? This is exactly what Dan Brown claims happened in the times following Christ’s death.

While the evidence surrounding the theory of Jesus and Mary Magdalene’s marriage is circumstantial at best, it is still worth investigation. For instance, “no one can prove that Jesus and Mary Magdalene weren’t married, and the supposition that early female disciples were prominent among Christ’s followers is reasonable,” which lends credit to at least the supposition that a marriage was not completely out of the question (Bethune 1). On one hand, it was Jewish custom at this time for older men to be married, and living life as a content bachelor would be quite conspicuous. Also, as Reverend Richard McBrien, a professor of theology at Notre Dame University proclaims, “it is clear that even some of the apostles were married, including Peter,” in accordance with Judean tradition (Burstein 60). However, any Sunday school teacher can tell you that Jesus was not too concerned about following Jewish religious customs, but in fact, his mission involved changing a number of those customs. For instance, most Jewish men would not have turned over the market tables in the temple in a violent rage, or asked his closest friends to eat bread and drink wine that he proclaimed was his body and blood. The notion that Jesus must have been married to be accepted to society is a notion built on shaky ground, as Jesus was not accepted by many during his time, including temple leaders. We must not forget that being

an outsider and doing things a little differently is what ultimately led to his death. Jesus didn't care about following customs and he certainly wouldn't have married just to "fit in."

Another point espoused in the *Code* is the belief that since Mary Magdalene was the first person whom Jesus appeared to after the resurrection, her position is one of extreme importance and this is why she is referred to as "apostle to the apostles" (Burstein 53). In accordance with this notion is the fact that Mary Magdalene is mentioned twelve times in the Bible—more than any other woman, save Jesus' mother, Mary. Another valid point is the fact that three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, provide accounts of only women, including Mary Magdalene, at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion, and it is implied that the male disciples are absent because of fear. Finally, from the first instance where Mary appears in the Bible to the last, she is always referred to as "Mary Magdalene" or "the Magdalene," indicating "a pervasive sense that the Gospel writers expected their readers to know who she was, recognizing her name immediately" (Burstein 16). Why, if there is so little now known about Mary Magdalene, would the gospel writers assume we would know who she was or what her importance was? Could it be that she was the wife of Jesus, and the gospel writers assumed that Christians would know this important fact for centuries to come? Perhaps that was their belief, and their assumption fell through because the Bible was constructed in such a way as to omit any mention of their nuptials, consequently cutting out vital records of Mary's life and the holy marriage. This can't be determined, but it is interesting to note these incidental facts when trying to conclude whether a marriage existed between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, or if Brown is simply reading into it. However, if he is, then he is not the only one, for influential leaders such as Martin Luther and Brigham Young, along with others, have indicated that they believed Jesus and Mary Magdalene shared a matrimonial bond (Van Biema 3).

The Holy Grail

Once Brown introduces his readers to the earth-shattering supposition that Mary Magdalene and Jesus were married, he then trumps his first theory by proclaiming yet another—Mary and Jesus were not only married, but she bore him a child and was the actual “Holy Grail.” At this point in the novel where Langdon and Teabing attempt to make sense of this belief, many readers begin recounting stories of lore and questioning “Hey, what happened to the cup?” Popular Christian tradition has labeled the Holy Grail as the chalice present at the Last Supper from which the disciples received the sacraments, and also present at the crucifixion where Jesus’ fallen blood was caught. Brown completely abolishes this theory and replaces it with the seemingly unbelievable notion that the Grail is not a cup and not even an inanimate object, but rather a woman—and not just any woman, but Mary Magdalene at that.

The Holy Grail has been sought after for centuries, at least in folklore and literature. Tales of Crusade warriors traveling to the Holy Land and searching for the treasure underneath the ruins of Solomon’s Temple are where the mystery begins. Soon after, the Knights of the Round Table begin searching for the famed prize, believing that it had been transported to France sometime after Jesus’ death by none other than Mary Magdalene herself and Joseph of Arimathea, her trusted friend. Legend has it that Mary escaped from Jerusalem after the resurrection because she feared for her life. Stories abound as to where she fled, ranging from the barren desert to Alexandria (in Egypt, interestingly enough) to even the southern coast of France, when she “took a sea voyage to Provence with, among others, her sister Martha and her brother Lazarus” (Slim 461). This is where the tale of the Holy Grail picks up within the *Code*, as France is believed to be the last country where the Grail was housed. And while interest in locating the Grail has subsided in recent centuries, the controversy surrounding it has increased

in intensity, especially with the release of Dan Brown's powerful novel. What is important to note is that the Grail has always been considered to be the chalice that was present at the Last Supper and contains the blood of Jesus. Interestingly enough, this is the exact same theory that Brown presents, but with a major twist in interpretation.

Plainly put, Brown also claims that the Grail is a chalice that was present at the Last Supper and contains the blood of Jesus. The only difference is that Brown believes that the Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene herself. One might ask, "how this could be?" The answer lies in the subject matter in which the novel involves so much of its plot. The *Code* deals extensively with symbols, with its main character, Robert Langdon, actually being a Harvard symbologist. A lengthy portion of the novel delves into the aspects of gender-related symbols, and Brown reveals that the classical symbols for the sexes are the spear (^) for the male, and ironically enough, the chalice (V) for the female. The spear represents the male sex because of its warlike nature, while the chalice represents the female because the female sex acts as a vessel for carrying offspring. This is the evidence that is the crux of Brown's argument for interpreting the Holy Grail to mean Mary Magdalene—she acted as a chalice, or vessel for carrying offspring, and over time, the double entendre was lost. One of Brown's intentions behind writing the *Code* may have been to drive the point home that "the Holy Grail, the 'vessel' that contained Jesus' blood and seed, is a coded reference to the womb in which Mary Magdalene carried his children" (Burstein 176). Eventually the coded language of referring to Mary as the chalice disappeared and the popular notion of the cup of Christ persevered.

Over time and space, Christians have come to know the story of the Holy Grail through tales and lore. The story goes that on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus passed around a chalice filled with wine and asked his disciples to drink from it, attesting that it was his blood. Later the

next day, that same chalice was used to catch his blood that was dripping from his body during the crucifixion. There is no explanation as to how the cup was brought to the crucifixion or who used it to retrieve the blood, but a number of inferences can be made. First, since three of the gospels include only women at the mount where the cross stood, it can possibly be deduced that one of these women brought the cup to the site and used it to catch his blood. But the reality of this conclusion is faulty at best, for believing in it means that one of these women, probably either Mary Magdalene, or Mary, the mother of Jesus, would have had to leave the day's activities at some time to retrieve the chalice and bring it to the cross. After that, someone would have had to approach the cross and catch the falling blood into the cup, an act that "the Roman soldiers would have hardly allowed" (Barb 45). And while Brown's claim that a woman is the true Grail seems far-fetched, believing that one of Christ's disciples left him at one of the most important times in human history to retrieve a cup seems equally implausible. Brown's explanation is that Mary Magdalene was this chalice and that she was indeed present at the Last Supper, but this topic will be further addressed later on.

Along with this theory is the *Code*'s inclusion that Mary Magdalene acted as a chalice in the same manner as the popular notion of the cup did—they both contained Jesus' blood. The difference lies in the interpretation, of course. While the cup of Christ supposedly caught his fallen blood during his ordeal on the cross, Mary Magdalene contained his blood in a more biological sense, meaning that she became pregnant by Jesus, continued his bloodline by acting as a chalice or vessel, and gave birth to Jesus' child. The Holy Grail was referred to in Old French as the *San Graal*, which Brown claims could be translated into *Sang Rael*, literally meaning "Royal Blood" (Bard 45). So, with a stretch of the imagination, one can see how the notion of Mary Magdalene, by representing a female chalice and carrying the blood of Christ in

the terms of his bloodline, could have been misconstrued in later times to mean a chalice which carried the blood of Christ that fell during his crucifixion. Popular tradition continues in the belief that Mary eventually traveled to France and brought the chalice with her, but Brown claims that by traveling to France, she was obviously transporting the Grail, simply because the Grail was her. The trail goes cold here and the whereabouts of the Holy Grail, whether a chalice or a woman, are unknown to this very day. Brown includes his own hypothesis that the remnants of Mary Magdalene are resting under the inverted pyramid that was newly erected in front of the Louvre pyramid, evoking his suggestion of the shape representing the chalice, and pointing to the final resting place of the Holy Grail. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest this, however, and the whereabouts of *any* Grail are unknown to the public, making verification of Brown's theory virtually impossible. Nevertheless, the importance of the Grail is paramount to the Christian faith, and as Mary Williams relates, "the Grail is the Chalice which fills all with their heart's desire" (88).

The Knights Templar

Just like the origins of the Holy Grail tale, the origins of another main theory included in the *Code* date back centuries to the Crusades. Around 1119, a group of elite soldiers was formed in Jerusalem known as the Knights Templar. Their primary role was to protect Christian pilgrims making their way to and from the Holy Land, but they also patrolled the main trade routes and engaged in policing capacities when necessary. According to the *Code*, King Baldwin II allowed the Templars to settle in the al-Aqsa mosque that supposedly stood over the ruins of the great Temple of Solomon. During their tour of duty, they allegedly discovered immense treasures buried deep under the surface, and folklore depicts the knights transporting much of this treasure back to their homelands in medieval France, where "it solidified their power and

wealth overnight” (Bethune 2). At least, this is the consensus according to Brown and a theory developed in his novel.

Historians tend to believe that the Templars were given great power and influence in order to keep the Holy Land free from Muslim invasion. In fact, Pope Innocent II actually issued a papal bull declaring that the knights were answerable to the pontiff alone, and free from rule by any secular ruler or law. However, the Knights were supposedly eradicated on Friday, October 13th of 1307, after a sweep ordered by King Philip the Fair of France, which resulted in erroneous charges and mass stake burnings. Many of the knights avoided death by recanting, which, according to writer and researcher Clive Prince, is “hardly surprising—not many victims of torture manage to grit their teeth and refuse to agree with the words put in their mouths by their tormentors” (Burstein 171-2). Questions abound as to whether the knights faced the Inquisition simply because of political maneuvering, or whether the group was destroyed by the Church because of their secret charge to protect the true notion of the Holy Grail. In accordance with history, the year 1307 is when the story of the Knights Templar ends, but in accordance with the *Code*, this is where another powerful and mysterious group begins.

Dan Brown’s book centers around a number of secret organizations, the most notable of which is the Priory of Sion. Although its history is sketchy, Brown claims in his novel, on the first page in fact, that the group is a real association that is still in existence today. Furthermore, he states that the primary purpose of the group is to protect the bloodline of Christ and Mary Magdalene, inferring that the bloodline still exists today. Historical evidence pertaining to the group is hardly credible, but the *Code* reveals that the Priory began in 1099 by Godefroi de Bouillon, and that this group ordered the formation of the Knights Templar before splitting from them nearly a century later. In 1956, the Priory, which was allegedly headed by Grand Master

Pierre Plantard, claimed that a document known as *Les Dossiers Secrets* outlined their history and importance in France. Along with this document comes a dubious list of grand masters, including such distinctive names as Victor Hugo, Isaac Newton, and, of course, Leonardo Da Vinci (Bustein 174). This is where Brown's novel becomes very interesting and finally draws connections from its various theories to promulgate an important and overarching theme.

Dan Brown includes information about Mary Magdalene, the Priory of Sion, and the Knights Templar in order to draw references for the very climax of his book. Although the Priory is "interesting to speculate about" and its documented history is questionable, Dan Brown brilliantly includes just enough tidbits of fact to keep readers biting for more. In the *Code*, a monk who is a member of the Catholic group, Opus Dei, is chasing Langdon and other characters. Brown contends that Opus Dei is an arm of the Catholic Church, and its purposes and dealings are mysterious. The inclusion of Opus Dei in the book is genius at the very least, for introducing readers to such a mysterious, wealthy, and powerful "personal prelature" of the Church gives credence to the *Code*'s proclamations regarding the Priory of Sion (Burstein 163). Readers can easily discover that Opus Dei really does exist, which leads to the assumption that if one secret society in the book is real and true, then they all must be. Inclusions and diversions such as this are what make the *Code* not only misleading and dangerous, but fascinating and quizzical at the same time.

Brown alleges that not only was Leonardo Da Vinci a grand master of the Priory of Sion, but that he left hidden clues in his artwork attesting to the belief that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, and that secrets lay behind what the Catholic Church was actually professing to the masses. The culmination of this theory lies in what may be Da Vinci's greatest piece—*The Last Supper*. Brown claims through his intricate characters Langdon and Teabing that the mural

contains a number of hidden references to the notions presented earlier in his book and already discussed in this thesis. Whether or not these suppositions should be believed or not, however, is completely left open for conjecture, as Leonardo is long gone, and the mysteries surrounding his artwork might very well have died with him.

The Last Supper

The Last Supper not only is donned on the cover of numerous books regarding the *Code*, but the newly-released illustrated edition of Brown's book comes with a two-page spread of the fresco, providing easy reference for the reader. Before this edition, a reader might have made a mad dash to the closest art book or online computer to see for him/herself whether the points revealed by Brown were true or not. Whether one believes in Brown's theories or not, there certainly is a call for a closer examination of Da Vinci's artwork.

First, the *Code* points out the plainly obvious regarding the famous fresco: Jesus and his disciples are gathered in a room and are depicted reacting to his statement that he will die soon and will be betrayed by one of them three times. The painting is beautiful and captivating in its own right, but Brown revives its splendor with a number of revelations that have gone virtually unnoticed for centuries by those not intricately familiar with the work of art. First, Brown points out that the painting does indeed contain thirteen people, but ironically enough, it contains twenty-seven arms, one of which is wielding a dagger. Secondly, and probably most importantly, Brown explains through Langdon that the person seated next to Jesus on his right is not the disciple John, as so many Christians have been led to believe, but that it is in fact Mary Magdalene. Upon first reading this statement in the novel, a common reaction for readers is plain disbelief—surely a woman placed in one of the most famous paintings in all the world would have been noticed and revealed centuries ago. And yet, the *Code* is so compelling in its

story that it leads so many readers to seek out the painting themselves to verify

Brown's/Langdon's theory. Subsequently, when people see the painting, many of them are amazed, but the question still remains as to why.

Brown proclaims in his novel that Mary is seated not only at the table of the Last Supper, but she is seated at the right hand of Jesus in what is commonly known as the seat of honor. He infers that a gesture of this magnitude surely implies that a special relationship exists between Jesus and Mary Magdalene—if it truly is Mary Magdalene in the fresco. The *Code* explains the painting in such a way that it allows the reader to agree with Langdon and Teabing's statements—that the person has long, flowing red hair, a plunging neckline, is beardless, and even has the faint hint of bosoms. According to the book, these inclusions in the painting surely mean that the character next to Jesus is none other than Mary herself. However, just as there are theories pointing to the belief that this individual is Mary Magdalene, there are just as many theories claiming the traditional belief that this character is John the Baptist, Jesus' close friend. Many historians would surely agree that Jesus' affinity with John would certainly be justifiable in explaining his position at the seat of honor—after all, *someone* had to sit there. As for the feminine qualities, these are explained away as well. Theologians and art buffs alike claim that John is usually showcased with long unbound hair and is most always shown beardless, unlike most of the other men in the picture. According to Diana Apostolos-Cappadona, a Religious Art Professor at Georgetown University, “There is a tradition of John being seen...as soft, feminine, and youthful,” which certainly explains the woman-like figure sitting next to Jesus (Burstein 230). Nevertheless, there is room for abounding speculation regarding the painting, especially, since so much of it has been restored and repainted since its uncovering. Inferences from the painting can be made, but their validity and correlation to Da Vinci's intentions may not be

known because of the intense restoration efforts that the fresco has undergone. Much of the painting is faded, discolored, or has decomposed, and even “Christ’s face, for example, is a completely modern re-painting” (Burstein 229). Along with the years of exposure and ambiguity behind the artwork’s design, there are other reasons to question Da Vinci’s motives behind the painting.

Stemming from Brown’s included proclamation espousing the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene comes the notion that the other disciples were jealous of Mary’s closeness with their Lord. In *The Last Supper*, Peter’s character is shown in a somewhat provocative manner as he seems to be slicing the throat of Mary, John, or whoever is depicted as seated next to Jesus. According to Brown, this gesture stems from the jealousy and dislike that the disciples, Peter especially, felt for Mary Magdalene. It is also Brown’s conclusion that the incorporation of this gesture was meant to slyly reveal to the masses the antipathy felt for Mary Magdalene, thereby pointing to the reason the Catholic Church eliminated her supposedly important position in canonical history. This gesture combined with the disembodied arm with a dagger pointed menacingly at what is alleged to be Mary Magdalene combine to form evidence for Brown’s theory that the disciples disliked Mary for the very reason that she was married to Jesus.

Congruent to Brown’s zest for combining symbols with theology, he also makes a number of statements regarding hidden symbols in the famous fresco. Brown uses Langdon to claim in the novel that the leaning division between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the painting creates a chalice shape, again alluding to the belief that Mary Magdalene is the Holy Grail. Langdon also claims that the two characters form a simple letter “M”, but less meaning can be derived from this alleged inclusion. Even Brown cannot explain its relevance, but instead makes conjectures that it stands for “marriage, matrimony” or possibly “Mary.” However, with no

concrete evidence either way, one could argue that it is equally plausible that the “M” stands for something else, or that the “M” does not even exist as a letter, but rather as a slight trick of the eye. While these elements are a little more difficult to spot, one can clearly visualize them with a little effort and a keen eye. Or, perhaps, one sees these symbols because they want to believe in something that is not actually there, as Simon Singh, a renowned physicist and symbologist, points out when stating “that’s what our brains do—look and ascribe meaning to things, sometimes even when it’s not warranted” (Burstein 206). Such is the problem when considering conspiracy theories, especially ones drawn mainly from circumstantial evidence.

Gnostic Gospels

Most of Brown’s theories have rested on conjecture, other scholars’ suppositions, and inferences regarding artwork, secret societies, and canonical history. However, there are a number of actual documents, known as the Gnostic Gospels that lend much credibility to Brown’s ideas, and at times, directly relate to the assumptions presented in the *Code*. A peasant named Muhammad ‘Alī discovered the Gospels in 1947 in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, where they were enclosed in a cylindrical vault and bound by leather covers. He transported them home, and before he could sell them, his mother burnt some of the codices for fuel, thereby eliminating what may have been one of the greatest discoveries regarding early Christianity (Burstein 141-2). Nevertheless, the Gospels contain a number of important passages and information relevant to the story of Mary Magdalene, her relationship with Jesus, and the foundations upon which the Catholic Church were constructed, all assuming a pre-Christian Gnosticism as the basis for the interpretation” (Yamauchi 129). The Nag Hammadi texts and the Dead Sea Scrolls “both altered immeasurably the character of their respective fields or research, namely, early Jewish and early Christian history” (Rudolph 452). Thanks to the discovery of these documents, scholars have

been able to deduce that the Christian movement following Jesus' death was much more widespread and diverse, and that the beliefs and views of Jesus represented an even larger scope than previously thought (Burstein 101). These discoveries represent a solid foundation for many of Brown's theories and give the *Code* that degree of authenticity that it so desperately needed.

Among the find was the Gospel of Mary, which Brown uses in his book to claim that Jesus gave specific instructions for her to found a church and carry on the faith. However, careful research has revealed no such instance or statement whereby Jesus directs Mary to do anything of the sort, at least not in this particular gospel. Remarkably, even a more conservative interpretation of this document does indicate that there was a special relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene and that even some of the other disciples were jealous or upset about it. This document unquestionably bolsters Brown's argument that a more intimate relationship did exist between Jesus and Mary, and leads to the conclusion that Da Vinci's inclusions of daggers and menacing gestures contained within *The Last Supper* may be based on actual occurrences.

Another important gospel contained in the Nag Hammadi treasure is the Gospel of Philip, which states less discretely that a relationship not only existed between the Jesus and Mary, but that this relationship created discourse within the disciples' group and led to antipathy and dislike for Mary. The document contains consequential language such as referring to Mary Magdalene as Jesus' "companion," but one must stipulate that this conclusion is drawn when based on a certain translation that uses this word. Also, as if this topic were not shrouded in enough mystery and intrigue already, the document puzzles and teases theologians and readers alike by containing the passage worded "Jesus kissed her on the m...[text is missing]" (Burstein 341). When viewed with the interpretation that the next word is "mouth," then this gospel seems to contain considerable evidence that an intimate relationship did exist between the two biblical

characters. However, if the next word is not mouth, then it is plausible to surmise that kissing frequently does not convey a relationship of marriage at all. Nevertheless, this gospel, along with others in the Nag Hammadi library, seems to point out that speculation regarding an important relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus is not that unfounded.

The discovery made at Nag Hammadi could possibly lead many to the belief that a holy marriage did exist and that the Catholic Church suppressed this knowledge in order to convey thematic elements of a religion that they thought would survive the test of time. While the Gnostic Gospels do provide a wealth of information relevant to the topic of the Holy Grail and a supposed marriage, they provide even more insight into the early formulations of Christianity before the Western culturalization of the powerful Catholic Church. The codices contain verses and history that point to a blending of many beliefs regarding Christ and the Christian faith before the indoctrination formed by the Catholic Church. The Gospels represent a type of writing that is very different from traditional scriptures, as “Jesus is always represented as ‘The Living One,’ without any concern for the problems of his death” (Koester 212). Differences such as these, as well as the inclusion of a gospel complete with direct sayings from Jesus himself are clear examples as to why these documents have become so important to researching not only early Christian beliefs, but also the possibility of Brown’s theories as holding true. The archeological discovery may very well hold the key to unlocking the mystery of how early Christianity formed in the first few centuries following Jesus’ death. The finding reveals a vast array of different and unique religious thought that prevailed in the early centuries, and lends weight to Brown’s theory that the Catholic Church suppressed their existence in order to formulate a Bible that would meet its needs and create a single, apostolic Church capable of uniting a diversified group of believers. Interestingly enough, many scholars have expressed the

notion that of “all the texts from the early Christian tradition that are known to have existed, only 15 percent have been recovered” (Burstein 350). When keeping this thought in mind, it is easy to suspect that other stories relating to Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the history of a relationship, perhaps even a marriage and child, may yet surface. Time will only tell whether those discoveries will prove or invalidate Brown’s theories presented in the *Code*.

Jesus

The central piece of evidence relating to every theory presented in the *Code* is Jesus himself—after all, “We live in a Jesus-haunted culture, a culture in which Jesus is a household name” (Rossi 2). Whether he was married, whether he fathered a child, whether he directed Mary to carry on his beliefs and institute a church, whether the Knights Templar and the Priory of Sion worked to preserve a royal bloodline, and whether Leonardo Da Vinci hid religious meanings pertaining to Jesus in his artwork are all contingent on one person—Jesus. Seemingly, there seems to be many questions surrounding this important man, and the *Code* centers around the theme that “almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false” (Burstein 160). Whether one believes this statement or not, one cannot even begin to understand the *Code*’s deep ramifications without first understanding the importance that this man has had on the world and the mystery that surrounds his amazing existence.

Christians have attempted for centuries to determine who this important spiritual and political man known as Jesus actually was. The traditional thought of Jesus as a bachelor has seemed to satisfy millions upon millions of Christian followers, so one may begin to wonder why speculation regarding his alleged marriage has so many believers up in arms. Many see the possible ramifications of a marriage involving Jesus as that of strengthening the fact that Jesus was nothing more than a mortal man, and not holy in any way. Another fear may be that a

marriage to a woman such as Mary Magdalene, if indeed she actually was a prostitute, would somehow degrade Jesus and make his existence less important. The fears may be justified, for the Christian faith is the predominant belief system for over two billion people, and any changes in its bedrock tenets could have disastrous consequences for the faith. However, it is equally possible that the fears are unfounded and that acceptance of *The Da Vinci Code* and its emanating theories would work to expound the Christian faith and resolve a half-century of theological debate. What is clear is that the figure of Jesus represented profound change and his very teachings “invite us to a process of exploration—not simply a set of beliefs which we must either accept or reject” (Burstein 105). When viewing Jesus in this light, one might be able to see how the *Code* can be interpreted not as a heretical book, but rather a novel that explores the possibilities of one of the most intriguing stories of all time.

Conclusion

Whether one supports Dan Brown's proclamations or denies their validity wholeheartedly, all readers must admit that his novel, the *Da Vinci Code*, has swept the nation, and the world, off their feet. Rather than dabbling with mundane plot elements and cliché expositions, Brown tackled some of the most important religious and philosophical topics of all time — Jesus, the Holy Grail, and the foundation of the Catholic Church. While his tactics duplicated those attempted in the past, Brown was fortunate enough to release his novel at the most opportune time, when the American public was inundated with a number of forces that aided in ascending the book to the top of the Bestseller's List. The upswing in feminist activism surely influenced a book that not only prizes the notion of the scared feminine, but also espouses the belief that a woman held one of the most important roles in Christian theology. Coupled with the feministic mystique was the overwhelming surge in the late 90s and early millennium of anti-Catholic sentiments centering on a number of papal scandals and impropriety. Finally, a trend of obsession with conspiracies that has been well-entrenched in American history created the perfect conditions necessary for a literary storm to develop. The result of these truly American social forces was the explosion of Brown's novel in pop culture, and the reactionary backlash it caused among scholars and theologians alike.

What is clear from the studying of the impetuses behind the overwhelming success behind the *Code* is that Americans react in ways that reflect the society they live in. Perhaps Americans are grappling with the realities of Christianity, or more likely, attempting to discover what that reality actually is. What is interesting to note is that Americans are looking to find religious answers in a book that is fictitious in nature. While it is true that the novel claims to advocate factual information, one can surely discern from this thesis that the evidence supporting

Brown's theories is circumstantial at best. It is this author's contention that James Robinson, a professor of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, is precise when stating, "the built-in problem of this book being a novel, and therefore saying it's fiction, but, at the same time, using enough facts, well-known names and things...give it a semblance of factual accuracy" (Burstein 98). Americans are looking to Brown's book for theological answers, but cannot seem to draw the line as far as what is fact and what is fiction. As long as Americans are investigating their faith and searching somewhere, even in a fiction book that seems to be "more sensational than factual," it is this author's assertion that a piece of writing that can inspire such a mass search for personal knowledge cannot be heretical (Burstein 98).

The dilemma of whether to believe Brown's claims or not regarding Jesus' supposed marriage to Mary Magdalene and a possible holy bloodline cannot be answered anytime soon. More historical evidence is needed to support a conclusion either way, as the information available to the world regarding the Holy Grail as of now seems to be inconclusive. What can be concluded, though, is the belief that the quest for the Grail is a metaphorical one and ultimately, represents a spiritual search for answers to life's most important questions. This author cannot direct his readers to believe or disbelieve Brown's theories in the *Code*, but instead, asks his readers to question whether the identity of the Holy Grail or the truth of a holy marriage could be established, and even if it could, would it be all that consequential? The *Da Vinci Code* may very well be the greatest conspiracy of all time, but it also might be the greatest revelation of the Christian faith. What is imperative is that readers continue to pursue answers, because "whether a conspiracy exists, you don't counter it by sitting around whining and carping about it. You fight back with education, community investment, pride, and responsible behavior" (Brown 2).

Dan Brown may claim to have the answers to the Grail mystery, but with the renewed interest in the topic caused by his novel, the most significant answers might yet to be unearthed.

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